

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2509

July 19, 2023

The Honorable Joe Manchin
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
Washington, 20510

Chairman Manchin:

Last week, new reports provided stunning information about radioactive contamination in the St. Louis area resulting from the Manhattan Project.¹ These reports reveal that contamination in the St. Louis area may prove to be among the most significant government-caused environmental disasters in our nation's history. What's worse, it's now clear that the Federal government knew about the contamination but failed to appropriately inform the public. I urge you to convene an oversight hearing as soon as possible to investigate this matter.

In the 1940's, uranium processing for the Manhattan project took place in downtown St. Louis, resulting in radioactive waste. The federal government then stored this waste above ground near the St. Louis airport for twenty years. The waste was improperly stored, causing it to seep into the ground and the nearby Coldwater Creek. In 1966, the Federal government hired a company, Cotter Corp, to dispose of the waste. Instead of properly disposing of the waste, the company dumped it in the West Lake Landfill, where it remains today.

The Department of Energy knew about contamination in Coldwater Creek as early as 1965, but kept information about the contamination from the public until 1990. According to the report, "Federal agencies knew of the potential human health risks of the creek contamination, but repeatedly wrote them off as 'slight,' 'minimal,' or 'low-level.'" Moreover, despite warnings from experts in Missouri, the Environmental Protection Agency failed to conduct adequate testing of the Westlake Landfill and continues to ignore Missouri experts' warnings of spreading contamination. These are just a few of the disturbing revelations from the 15,000 pages of government documents obtained by the news media.

During my time on this Committee, I have pressed Department of Energy officials to remediate radioactive contamination in the St. Louis area. And, as you know, on October 18, 2022 the Hazelwood School District shut down Jana Elementary School in Florissant, Missouri, after private testing found radiation levels that were 22 times higher than normal levels in the school. I have written to the Department of Energy, the Army Corps of Engineers, and even the President asking for remediation of the elementary school and the Federal government has yet to take meaningful action.

¹ <https://missouriindependent.com/2023/07/12/st-louis-radioactive-waste-records/>;
<https://apnews.com/article/nuclear-waste-cancer-st-louis-army-corps-school-9e1ceb765822fc53fcbc2e42005adef2>

Residents in the St. Louis area, and frankly all Americans, deserve answers from the federal government about this horrible catastrophe. I urge you to convene a hearing with department officials to discuss the agencies' roles in this government-caused disaster and the steps the agencies are taking to remediate the area.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Hawley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Josh Hawley
United States Senator